
Nicholas PhD Advocacy Council

2016-2017 Year End Report

April 19th, 2017

In its second year as the PhD student advocacy organization at the Nicholas School, NPAC worked diligently to create and launch initiatives to address many of the concerns and needs of the PhD student community, as described in the student polling data collected in 2015. Building off our organization's [mission](#), [vision](#) and [strategic plan](#), we focused on six different initiatives. These initiatives emphasized the core strategies of increasing cross-disciplinary and cross-program interactions, clarifying resources available for career development and inter-campus connectivity, and improving our communications and web presence.

This document summarizes the objectives and accomplishments of each initiative, as well as a detailed analysis of recommendations for the coming year (2017-2018). Significant progress was made on all of the initiatives, notably the centralization of PhD-focused career resources, infrastructure to support MEM-PhD collaborations, a new website, increased connectivity between main campus and the Marine Lab, the launch of the first round of interdisciplinary small grants, and beginning the planning process for a school-wide PhD symposium.

Additionally, this year NPAC became an official Nicholas School Student Council (NSSC) group, and participated in their budget allocation process for the first time. This will allow for a more institutionalized and reliable source of funding for NPAC initiatives. The Council also increased focus on social events, culminating in an end-of-year forest gathering, and plans to expand to more outreach and social events in the coming year. We're excited to pass along a stronger and more institutionally ingrained organization as it begins its third year.

Prepared by the 2016-2017 Nicholas PhD Advocacy Council

Emily Pechar (UPEP), Co-Chair

Emily.pechar@duke.edu

Joanna Blaszczyk (UPE), Co-Treasurer
Katy Hansen (UPEP), ESP Student-Faculty Liaison
Cathy Chamberlain (UPE), GAS Coordinator
Lauren Carley (UPE), UPE Program Chair
Chelsea Clifford (ENV), ENV Program Chair
Tess Leuthner (TOX), TOX Program Chair
Ryan Huang (UPE), UPE GPSC Rep
Corrie Hannah (ENV), ENV GPSC Rep
Matthew Ruis (TOX), TOX GPSC Rep

Lydia Greene (UPE), Co-Chair

Lydia.greene@duke.edu

John Gardner (ENV), Co-Treasurer
Ryan Peabody (EOS), Social/Orientation Coord.
Anna Wade (ENV), GAS Coordinator
Justin Kirkpatrick (UPEP), UPEP Program Chair
Alejandro Lozano (MSC), MSC Program Chair
Kendra Kaiser (EOS), EOS Program Chair
Stephanie Stefanski (UPEP), UPEP GPSC Rep
Stacy Zhang (MSC), MSC GPSC Rep
Seaver Wang (EOS), EOS GPSC Rep

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Initiative 1: PhD Career Development Support

Overview:

The Career Development initiative focused on surveying the landscape of career support resources available to Nicholas PhD students, collecting and documenting these resources, and beginning conversations with the Career office about increased career development support for PhD students. Particular attention was paid to increasing support for non-academic job searches. Future work on this initiative could continue these conversations, and begin to institutionalize PhD-specific career events at the Nicholas School.

Accomplishments in 2016-2017:

1. Comprehensive professional development document with available resources for NSOE students: <https://sites.duke.edu/espgrad/career/>
 - a. Included meeting with Deb Wojcik to discuss the overlap and differences between NSOE programming vs. Graduate School programming.
 - b. Sent to Dave McDonald (Graduate School Career Series), Deb, and Karen Kirchof to review the document. Dave is helpful, Deb is likely to be more helpful as key positions in NSOE Career Services are filled.
2. Outlined the structure and professional development resources at the Marine Lab.
3. Assessed the opportunities for getting a professional development grant & provided notes for writing a Professional Development Grant.

Outstanding Needs:

1. Special orientation specifically on navigating resources for career services on campus. We suggest holding such an orientation in January, at the beginning of each Spring semester.
2. Learning more about the breadth of career opportunities specific to the environment, including the opportunity to network with PhD alumni and both representative speakers from academic and non-academic careers. Of particular interest is a better understanding of alternative career paths.
3. Supporting the development of tools & skills associated with the job search process (see Professional Development Grant Notes for more details)
4. Specialized training for NSOE faculty about the breadth of career opportunities to PhD students in environmental careers, so that they can be more supportive of our career interests and better prepared to address our concerns.

Suggested Plan for 2017-2018:

Start building up & connecting with PhD alumni network, especially with alumni living in the Triangle area. There is a suggestion of starting a mentorship program between NSOE alumni and current PhDs. Alumni can be matched with PhD students based on career interests/pathways, field of study, etc. It would provide an opportunity to increase professional networking, and also enable PhD students to get a better understanding about the job market they are interested in, application/interview process, etc.

2016-2017 Contacts:

Corrie Hannah: corrie.hannah@duke.edu

Kendra Kaiser: Kendra.kaiser@duke.edu

Relevant Documents/Information:

Professional Development Grants & Additional Opportunities:

- **Professional Development Grant - Fall 2017**

Departments/programs, clusters, and students may request up to \$2,000 from the grant to fund their efforts to provide professional development programming and resources during the 2017 calendar year. Proposals are solicited once a year in the fall.

<https://gradschool.duke.edu/professional-development/professional-development-grant>

- **Duke Support for Interdisciplinary Graduate Network (D-SIGN) - March 29, 2017**

Grants are available to graduate student groups to propose an interdisciplinary project, **training**, or experience lasting up to a year. Preference will be given to proposals that include participation across schools and that include professional students and well as doctoral students.

Proposals require a lead faculty sponsor who agrees to mentor the group; an organizational sponsor (preferably a department, school, or institute/initiative) willing to handle funds and provide logistical support; endorsement from an additional faculty member from a different discipline or school; a plan of work; and anticipated outcomes. Where appropriate, these activities should count toward curricular requirements.

<https://sites.duke.edu/interdisciplinary/2017/01/30/grants-available-to-support-interdisciplinary-graduate-networks/>

Initiative 2: Nicholas Vertical Integration & Collaboration (Nic-VIC)

Overview:

Nicholas Vertical Integration and Collaboration (Nic-VIC) is a mentorship program connecting PhD students and Master of Environmental Management students (MEMs) through MEM Master's Projects (MPs). Through these new connections, we hope to leverage the unique interdisciplinary atmosphere in the Nicholas School, using collaboration and mentorship to bridge gaps between basic and applied environmental research.

This initiative was pitched in the 2015-2016 academic year, and a survey of PhD students in the Nicholas School indicated broad interest in facilitating MEM-PhD collaborations and mentorship opportunities. In this second year of planning, the Nic-VIC subcommittee worked to move from idea development to implementation.

Accomplishments in 2016-2017:

The Nic-VIC subcommittee successfully organized an in-person MEM/PhD mixer in November 2016 to encourage and facilitate interdisciplinary and inter-degree discussion of potential collaborations. At this event, the subcommittee also took feedback from attendees about what tools and resources they would find helpful in initiating collaborative work. Suggestions included tabling for this initiative along with other student body clubs and organizations in the fall semester, advertising the initiative in other outlets (e.g. NicDig, creating a Facebook group), providing funding opportunities for collaborative work (currently being pursued by a separate NPAC initiative), organizing an in-person event to pitch concrete proposals to find collaborators, and developing a central, searchable list of project ideas that students can browse to identify and contact potential collaborators.

In response to this feedback, the Nic-VIC subcommittee developed two concrete tools to help facilitate collaborations. The first is a [Google form](#) that students can use to submit collaborative project ideas and specify the type of collaborator they seek, the time frame they are operating on, etc. The second is a [searchable database](#) concatenating the results from the Google form submissions, which students can browse to view project idea submissions and see if any match their interests or goals.

Outstanding Needs:

Plans to implement a second in-person event for individuals to pitch collaborative project ideas fell through at the last minute. As a result, little response to the launch of the collaboration database was generated. The timing of this event was planned to shortly precede the finalization of first-year MEM students' MP topics, early in the spring semester. (After they choose their MPs, MEMs have less time to take on outside projects, so connecting with them about promising collaborative project options before then is important.) At this time, we have received no submissions to the online project database. If interest exists (as indicated by the 2015-2016 survey and feedback from the November Nic-VIC mixer), advertising this resource effectively and complementing it with in-person events is critical for its success.

Suggested Plan for 2017-2018:

We think that the most productive course of action would be to re-launch the project database in August 2017 to solicit submissions from PhD students. Advertising not just to the nic-phds listserv but individually to programs by NPAC program chairs could help the initiative penetrate through the large quantity of generalized emails that often go unread, and help connect to individuals more effectively. The subcommittee members and the MEM liaison should plan to table at the MEM student clubs/organizations event early in the academic year (September 2017?) to connect with new MEM students. Planning another in-person info session shortly following those two efforts would be helpful to make sure that projects are actually submitted to the database; re-introducing the idea to the public, explaining how to use the database, and possibly even helping people workshop proposal ideas in person could help get momentum moved toward actually stimulating active collaborations, rather than abstract support for the idea of collaborations. Doing this earlier in the year and moving to the phase of actual concrete project pitches before the MP deadline is critical; our understanding is that effort made after February each academic year is essentially useless from the MEM perspective, as they are committed to their major projects after then.

Soliciting guidance from Deb Wojcik, who initiated a similar interdisciplinary collaboration initiative at Stanford, Sheila Patek, who runs the Duke undergrad-matching project database MUSER, and/or others with experience in idea implementation could be helpful in getting thing off the ground.

Alternatively, if student interest appears to be minimal or non-existent, it may actually be best to scrap this initiative and focus energy elsewhere. It is a great idea, but if no one wants to do it, we are just moving in circles with NPAC time and effort. At this point, it is hard to tell if this is the case, or if the enthusiasm is there but just hasn't caught on in practice yet.

2016-2017 Contacts:

Lauren Carley: lauren.carley@duke.edu

Joanna Blaszcak: Joanna.blaszcak@duke.edu

Katy Hansen: katy.hansen@duke.edu

Relevant Documents/Information:

[Submit a collaborative project idea](#)

[Collaboration database](#)

[2015-2016 initiative report](#)

Initiative 3: Website

Overview:

This initiative addressed information accessibility on many topics including degree requirements, career support, and others. We made progress both by revamping of NPAC's website, and by advocating for specific changes on the official NSOE website, some of which have been implemented.

Accomplishments in 2016-2017:

We moved NPAC's website to a more memorable address (sites.nicholas.duke.edu/npac) and updated the structure to be more user friendly, and to include more information for students to use. The main page serves as an announcement page for NPAC activities, and the rest of the website is designed to more clearly describe what NPAC is and what its activities are. The website is also designed to be a platform for disseminating information about future NPAC activities, such as the 2017 PhD symposium and orientation. We are adding to a "Resources" section to both bring together and supplement information commonly needed by NSOE PhD students currently dispersed among the websites for the Nicholas School, the Graduate School, GPSC, the Duke libraries, etc. This section includes output from other NPAC initiatives, like the Career Initiative. We hope that NPAC will be able to keep this page updated going forward, but also worked to encourage NSOE to put more information useful to PhD students, especially important official documents, in easy-to-find places on their official website.

We met with Stephanie Martinek, the administrator of the official NSOE website, and other faculty and staff involved in prioritizing and implementing changes to it. We provided input on how the official page may better attract interested prospective PhD students, and shared our ideas of what would be helpful for current students to have available. As a result, the official nicholas.duke.edu site now includes an "info for enrolled students" page for ENV and MSC, accessed from the "doctoral" selection on the "Academic Programs" menu. These pages briefly explain the milestones of completing each PhD, with milestones like certification meetings and prelims, and include links to some important associated forms. Each page also includes a short description of funding options, the TA requirement, and conference travel reimbursements. The EOS version is two pages, program requirements and a timetable, and ITEHP, UPE, and UPEP pages link to existing pages compiled by the programs themselves. Stephanie and Danielle Wiggins (DGSA for ENV, UPE, and UPEP) have plans to continue to update these pages, and the NSOE website in general, to make it more friendly to PhD students, both current and prospective.

Outstanding Needs:

Danielle still fields many of the same common questions from students in every program every day; we would like to have a centralized "FAQ" that students refer to. We also need to make students aware of website updates, so they know to look to the NSOE and NPAC websites for answers first, instead of going straight to Danielle. Danielle hopes to streamline more online systems currently separated across programs, like reimbursements, in future. Stephanie says deeper changes to the structure of the whole NSOE website will be possible at the next website redesign in a few years. The NSOE "Admissions" pages remain almost entirely MEM-focused, in keeping with NSOE's own Admissions staff admitting MEMs only, but Stephanie said she would try to find places on those pages to acknowledge and better direct PhD prospective students as well, after completing priorities for the fall mandated by the NSOE administration.

Suggested Plan for 2017-2018:

Next year, we encourage NPAC to continue to provide suggestions, content, and priorities for making the NSOE website work better for PhD students to Danielle and Stephanie, as they continue to work to help us. We suggest focusing on Danielle's FAQ's. Additionally, one NPAC member should take primary responsibility for updating the website, including with relevant information from all the NPAC initiatives.

2016-2017 Contacts:

Cathy Chamberlain: catherine.chamberlain@duke.edu

Chelsea Clifford: chelsea.clifford@duke.edu

Relevant Documents/Information:

<http://sites.nicholas.duke.edu/npac/>

Initiative 4: Symposium

Overview:

Currently there is no event through which PhD students at NSOE can gather to present their broad range of research to each other and to the larger community in a formalized conference. Previously, the annual Ecology Symposium filled this void for a number of ecology-focused students in the school. However, following the Ecology Symposium's pivot toward genetics research, and the realization that even a term as broad as "ecology" does not cover the body of research conducted by doctoral students at the Nicholas School, NPAC has received approval for planning a fall symposium. If successful, this event holds the opportunity to become an integral part of the NSOE's annual schedule and help achieve the school's mission to be a cohesive place of interdisciplinary environmental work.

Accomplishments in 2016-2017:

NPAC reached out to the administration for their support with the event, applied for funding, and tentatively scheduled the symposium for September 2017. Currently, NPAC is accepting nominations for keynote speakers. Groundwork for the event will be laid primarily in the summer of 2017.

Outstanding Needs:

Funding, concrete plans and dates for symposium (dependent on funding), continued communication with Erika Lovelace and Nancy Kelly (who oversee class schedules and school-wide events respectively), and student support.

Suggested Plan for 2017-2018:

The success of the first symposium and next year's round of funding will impact whether or not the symposium happens again in 2018. The organizers plan to work over summer, bringing new members of NPAC into the planning, so the new members can organize the following symposium (2018)

2016-2017 Contacts:

Anna Wade: anna.wade@duke.edu

Ryan Peabody: ryan.peabody@duke.edu

Initiative 5: Cross- Disciplinary Small Grants

Overview:

In Fall of 2015, the Nicholas PhD Advocacy Council (NPAC) conducted a survey to help steer and better serve PhD students on issues related to administrative, financial, community, and career services. In student responses, strong interest was expressed in increasing available opportunities for research collaborations between students from different programs. In light of this feedback, NPAC passed an initiative in spring of 2016 spurring the creation of an "Interdisciplinary Small Grants Program", which received \$3,000 for the 2016-2017 academic year to fund cross-disciplinary PhD-PhD collaboration efforts.

These grants are intended to foster peer collaboration across disciplines that have the potential to enhance or complement the work of participating collaborators beyond what they would be able to individually achieve. Grant applications are open to any group of collaborators provided that at least one project co-investigator is enrolled in an NSOE-PhD program, and that the nature of the proposed project is interdisciplinary, involving research in more than one field. Grants were envisioned to be funded on a scale ranging from \$250-\$1500 per project. Application materials consist of a project proposal, budget outline, and a description of the roles that each co-investigator will play in the project, as well as curricula vitae and basic applicant information. Awardees are required to present their collaborative work at the Nic School Research Symposium in Fall 2017.

Accomplishments in 2016-2017:

In Fall of 2016, NPAC designed the small grant application with feedback from Senior Assoc. Dean Dr. Dean Urban. The initiative was promoted by NPAC to the Nicholas School PhD. student community, and applications were opened in mid-February. Due to low initial interest, the application deadline was extended to mid-April 2017 from the original mid-March deadline. Five applications for small grants were received and will shortly be submitted for review by a faculty committee. In addition, NPAC also conducted a student survey with 34 respondents to assess interest in the small grants initiative for the upcoming 2017-2018 academic year. Respondents indicated general interest in applying for a small grant next year (62%), and about half of respondents expressed that their interest in applying for a small grant would increase if the available funding per project were to be increased.

Applications for this year's small grants initiative closed on Monday April 17, 2017. Five applications were received. All submitted applications will be forwarded to a faculty review panel, and NPAC anticipates awarding successful proposals by early May.

Outstanding Needs:

In addition to the remaining tasks mentioned above to be completed in Spring of 2017 (review, and awarding of proposals received), NPAC hopes to transition to planning for the continuation of this initiative in 2017-2018. As next year's intended application period will take place in Fall of 2017, advance planning will be crucial to ensure a prompt start to the program.

Suggested Plan for 2017-2018:

Currently, NPAC has requested an increased initiative budget of \$5000 for the 2017-2018 academic year. NPAC plans to open small grants applications in early September of 2017 and to market the program more heavily to new students in addition to returning PhD. students. More wide marketing across the Nicholas school, perhaps accompanied by promotion of the initiative by NPAC representatives at Nic School or departmental events, may help generate stronger interest in the program.

For 2017-2018, NPAC should also ensure that grantees awarded in 2016-2017 present a summary of their activities and results at the fall symposium.

2016-2017 Contacts:

Seaver Wang: seaver.wang@duke.edu

Tess Leuthner: tess.leuthner@duke.edu

Relevant Documents/Information:

- [**NPAC Small Grants Application Form**](#)
- [**NPAC Small Grants Application – Advisor Letter of Support**](#)

Initiative 6: Marine Lab – Main Campus Connectivity

Overview:

The overarching goal of this initiative is to increase connectivity of ideas, people, and academic opportunities between the Durham and Marine Lab (ML) campuses. Based on student surveys and additional research, we have outlined three recommendations to this end. These recommendations are achievable in the short term with immediate and long-term benefits. They include providing logistical information for individuals traveling between campuses on Nicholas School websites, increasing telepresence of seminars/courses, and supporting an all Nicholas School graduate symposium.

Accomplishments in 2016-2017:

We gathered information to make different resources available across campuses (e.g., parking passes for ML students visiting main campus; career development resources). As NPAC more generally, we have encouraged the connectivity across schools through broader inclusion in seminar announcements and also by asking event coordinators to provide remote access via telepresence.

We also created a listserv in Duke Lists (nicphd_mlride@duke.edu) that would allow students in both Durham and Beaufort to coordinate ride-sharing and accommodations when traveling from one campus to another. We will be putting all the information for this listserv on the NPAC website and encourage people to use it.

Outstanding Needs:

Outstanding needs include posting information to the NPAC website (which Alejandro and John will do), continuing to create a more inclusive culture through increased telepresence, support an all Nicholas school symposia, and solutions to ongoing transportation issues. In the coming weeks, we will post information on the NPAC website so people can access the listserv and other resources. The issue of transportation between campuses remains something that could be explored next year. Students clearly need and support the possibility of having Duke-supported transportation between campuses. Possible solutions can be explored by contacting the MSC DGSA, Rachel Lo Piccolo (rachel.lopiccolo@duke.edu) (252) 504-7585), and other key administrators.

Suggested Plan for 2017-2018:

This does not need to be a specific initiative next year, but rather it should be something all initiatives and events coordinated through NPAC and the Nicholas School should consider. In practice, this means continued telepresence and cross communicating events at both campuses, advertising the listserv for ride/house shares between campuses, and continuing to develop more permanent solutions to travel/parking logistics on the main campus through.

2016-2017 Contacts:

Alejandro Lozano: alejandrogarcia.lozano@duke.edu

John Gardner: john.gardner@duke.edu

Relevant Documents/Information:

[Draft Content for Website can be found at [THIS LINK](#) OR the text below]

Information for traveling between Duke Main Campus and Marine Lab

We understand it can be difficult for students at the Duke Marine Lab (DUML) and main campus to remain connected for social, academic, and professional activities. Achieving a highly integrated school will require ongoing effort. Nonetheless, we have put together some resources that might make it easier to bridge the distance and maintain those connections.

Ride-sharing & Accommodations E-mail List (nicphd_mlride@duke.edu)

We created the ***nicphd_mlride*** listserv in order to make it easier for students to communicate about sharing rides and finding accommodations while visiting either campus. Even if you do not travel between the campuses, we highly recommend joining this listserv to provide information and resources for your fellow students.

To subscribe to this list, send an e-mail to sympa@duke.edu from the address you want to subscribe to the list. In the subject line of your message, type in: "subscribe nicphd_mlride FirstName LastName." Leave the body of the message blank. You will then receive a message telling you your subscription was approved. You can go to <https://lists.duke.edu/sympa> and sign in using your Duke NetID to manage your list subscriptions at any time.

Once you are subscribed, you can send an e-mail to nicphd_mlride@duke.edu any time you need a ride, for example, or if you are offering up your couch for visiting students.

Information for students at the Marine Lab

Visiting Main Campus from the Marine Lab, whether for fun or for work meetings, can be complicated. Hopefully the e-mail list above can help with finding rides and accommodations when visiting, but parking on Main Campus remains a challenge. Fortunately, there are some day parking passes available to students visiting from DUML. To obtain a parking pass, contact **Anne Davis** at the Nicholas School Office:

anne.m.davis@duke.edu

(919) 684-1290

A140 LSRC (Hug Commons area)

Some other useful contacts on Main Campus include:

Nicholas School IT, it@nicholas.duke.edu

919-613-8148

Information for Students at Main Campus

Students on Main Campus might also want to visit the Marine Lab for meetings or seminars (kayaking around the island is pretty great too). In case you are not able to find accommodations through other students, you may be able to stay at one of the dorms on the island. To find out more about it you can contact **Dominick Brugnolotti**, Director of Campus Services (dominick.brugnolotti@duke.edu, 252-504-7652). Parking is relatively easy at the marine lab and there are usually plenty of spots, but make sure you notify Dominick if your car will be there for an extended period of time.

If you would like to remotely attend any of the seminars at the Marine Lab, contact the person who is organizing the seminar (it may vary across semesters). However, you can always contact one of our IT staff members to make sure telepresence is made available for you:

Marine Lab IT, marineit@nicholas.duke.edu, (252) 504-7599

In addition, many of the seminars are recorded and made available as Panopto links (<https://nsoe.capture.duke.edu/Panopto/Pages/Sessions/List.aspx>).

NPAC 2016-2017 Budget

Initiative	Item	Amount Budgeted	Amount Spent
Graduate Afternoon Seminar	Food and drinks	1750	1200
		1750	1200
Nicholas School Orientation	Forest Party	600	600
	Additional Orientation Food/Events	700	700
		1300	1300
Nic-Vic	Joint MEM-PhD event	200	200
		200	200
Social (End of Year Event)	Food	250	TBD
	Drink	250	TBD
		500	TBD
Small Interdisciplinary Grants	Grant Distribution	3000	TBD
		3000	TBD
GRAND TOTAL		\$6,750	\$2,700 (as of 4/18/18)

NPAC 2017-2018 Budget Proposal

Initiative	Item	Amount
Graduate Afternoon Seminar	Food and drinks	1000
		1000
Nicholas School Orientation	Forest Party	600
	Additional Orientation Food/Events	700
		1300
Nic-Vic	Joint MEM-PhD event	250
		250
PhD Careers	Career event with guest speaker	250
		250
Social (End of Year Event)	Food	250
	Drink	250
		500
Small Interdisciplinary Grants	Grant Distribution	5000
		5000
Symposium	Food (2 days: light breakfast, lunch, snacks)	4000
	Refreshments (2 days)	700
	Keynote speaker flight/transportation	500
	Keynote speaker hotel	400
	Keynote speaker dinner	300
	Keynote speaker honorarium	300
		6200
GRAND TOTAL		\$14,500